Indigenous communities see effects of climate change up close, congerence told

Edmonton Examiner

March 15, 2018 Thursday

Final Edition

Copyright 2018 Edmonton Examiner All Rights Reserved

Section: LOCAL NEWS; Pg. A17

Length: 439 words

Byline: Hina Alam, Postmedia Network

Body

Members of Indigenous communities are seeing aberrations in wildlife sightings, a climate change conference was told Tuesday in Edmonton.

"The warmer climates are bringing on different animals," said Vickie Wetchie, economic development director of Montana First Nations. "There are pelicans where pelicans were not seen before."

Wetchie was a panelist on a Climate Change Impacts on Indigenous People session at the Cities and Climate Change Science Conference at the Shaw Conference Centre, and spoke to Postmedia.

A lot of what Indigenous communities are seeing is caused by climate change, said Norma Spicer, a Métis elder who lives in Edmonton and gave a prayer at the start of the session.

"Our very way of life is being affected, especially in rural communities," Spicer said.

Spicer said she travels to different communities, and is seeing a lot of people who need to gather their own food and do their hunting, not doing any of that.

"The lakes are getting more and more pollution," she said. "A lot of that is climate change - you see more algae It's not like it was."

Animals are not as plentiful, she said, adding overhunting is exacerbating the problem.

A lot of Indigenous people live in rural areas, Spicer said. With climate change, young people can't go about their usual routines.

"If you can't find the animals to trap or hunt, what do you do - you pull up roots," she said. "And our people are moving (to Edmonton) - there's no work here. They come into a fast-paced society and they are forgotten It's not all our population, but that's what I've seen climate change doing.

"We have some wonderful things happening to our people, as well, but that's not as a result of climate change."

Wetchie said Indigenous communities are starting to have dialogues about the changes they are seeing in the natural world.

As the rest of the scientific world tackles climate change, they are looking to Indigenous people for answers. But some are questioning the sharing of knowledge.

"Why did they want us to help?" she said. "We didn't pollute the Earth. We didn't put these chemicals in the earth or in the air or in the water or in the soil, but yet you come to us Indigenous people to ask for help. We've known Mother Earth is sick, we've seen those changes."

Wetchie said climate change is impacting hunting, fishing and gathering rights.

"That's our human rights," she said. "It's our way of life. But it's also our treaty rights here in Canada, so there's an obligation for Canada to do what it needs to do so that we can maintain our way of life and the stewardship of sharing this land that we're on, which is written in our treaty."

Graphic

Greg Southam Postmedia; Maria Dunn performs at the Cities and Climate Change Science Conference, on Tuesday, March 6, 2018 in Edmonton.;

Load-Date: March 15, 2018

End of Document